A survey report on happiness index and determinants of happiness in Hong Kong

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December 2006
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A Survey Report on Happiness Index and Determinants of Happiness in Hong Kong

Lok Sang Ho and Gary Wong*

1. Introduction

A survey was conducted by the authors in June 2005 using the facilities of the Survey Research Program of Lingnan University. It was a telephone survey using the random-digit-dialing sampling method. The target respondents were Hong Kong residents (excluding full-time student) aged 21 or above. We successfully interviewed 717 Hong Kong residents.

2. Empirical Findings

2.1 Descriptive Statistics of Happiness Index

2.1.1 Overall
On a scale of 0 to 100, it was found that the average index for Hong Kong is 71.4, which is considerably higher than the neutral 50 point, and suggests that Hong Kong people are predominantly happy. Moreover, most people feel that they are happier than 10 years ago, with the improvement index at 61.3, where any index above 50 suggests an improvement.

2.1.2 Sex
Females are generally happier than males, at 72.62 as compared to the male average of 69.58. This result resembles results obtained elsewhere.

2.1.3 Age and Education
Elderly people tend to be happier, with the 50 and above group scoring an average of 75.38, higher than the 71.08 of the 30-49 group. Younger adults in their twenties score only an average of

* Professor Lok Sang Ho is Professor of Economics and Director of Centre for Public Policy Studies and Mr. Gary Wai-chung Wong is Research Development Officer of Centre for Public Policy Studies, Lingnan University, Hong Kong. We thank Lingnan University and the Centaline Charity Foundation for sponsoring the Conference on Progress, Happiness, and Public Policy and for funding this study.
67.39. Of the elderly group, those with university education are the happiest, with a score of 85. But this education premium does not show up for the younger population, a result probably related to much greater availability of university education in recent years.

2.1.4 Social and Political Values
Hong Kong people value civic liberties which are protected by the rule of law much more than electoral democracy.

Figure 1. Frequency Distribution of Happiness Score
Figure 2. Happiness Index by Age

Figure 3. Happiness Index by Sex
Happiness Index by Education

Happiness Index by Spiritual Practice vs No Spiritual Practice
Happiness Index by Religion

- 天主教或基督教 (Catholics/Protestants)
- 佛教 (Buddhists)
- 無宗教 (atheists)

Happiness Index by Marital Status

- 未婚 (Single)
- 已婚 (Married)
- 離婚/分居 (Divorce)
Are HK People Happier Over The Last 10 Years

Importance of Health Care Services on Happiness

Mean = 7.76
2.2 Regression Analysis: Determinants of Happiness

2.2.1 Variables Definitions
Table 1. presents the list of variables and their definitions. The dependent variable is the Happiness Index (Question 27) which ranges from 0 to 100. The number of observations for the dependent variable is based on valid responses only (i.e. all missing values were excluded from the analysis). Here we treat “Don't Know” responses and “Refuse to Respond” as “missing value”.

2.2.2 Regression Results
Those who put a high value on marriage, children, and friends, and harmonious personal relationships within the family are generally happier than others. Those who attach a higher value on money tend to be less happy, although the result is not statistically significant.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent Variable</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness Index</td>
<td>From zero to 100, 0 means not happy at all; 100 means most happy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent Variable</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young</td>
<td>1 = age 21-29, 0 = Other age groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old</td>
<td>1 = age 50 or above, 0 = Other age groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1 = Female, 0 = Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Health</td>
<td>1 = Good Health Status, 0 = Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Health</td>
<td>1 = Good Health Status, 0 = Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair Health (reference Group)</td>
<td>1 = Fair Health Status, 0 = Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Practice</td>
<td>1 = Yes, 0 = No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1 = Married, 0 = Other marital status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>1 = Primary graduate, 0 = Other educational attainments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>1 = Tertiary graduate, 0 = Other educational attainments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary (reference group)</td>
<td>1 = Secondary graduate, 0 = Other educational attainments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Income Household</td>
<td>1 = Household Income &lt; $HKD 20,000, 0 = Other Income levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Personal Income</td>
<td>1 = Personal Income &gt; $HKD 20,000, 0 = Other Income levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Money (Q.2)</td>
<td>From 0 to 10, 0 means not important, 10 means very important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Marriage (Q.14)</td>
<td>From 0 to 10, 0 means not important, 10 means very important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Having Children (Q.17)</td>
<td>From 0 to 10, 0 means not important, 10 means very important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Harmonious Family (Q.23)</td>
<td>From 0 to 10, 0 means not important, 10 means very important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Friends (Q.20)</td>
<td>From 0 to 10, 0 means not important, 10 means very important</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Determinants of Happiness
Dependent Variable: Happiness Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Significant level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>65.016</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young</td>
<td>-0.697</td>
<td>0.731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old</td>
<td>5.138</td>
<td>0.058*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2.494</td>
<td>0.060*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Health</td>
<td>-7.012</td>
<td>0.011**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Health X Spiritual Practice</td>
<td>9.634</td>
<td>0.075*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Health</td>
<td>4.820</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Practice (Yes)</td>
<td>6.196</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4.338</td>
<td>0.009***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>1.991</td>
<td>0.387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>0.853</td>
<td>0.582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Income Household</td>
<td>-2.660</td>
<td>0.071*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 indicates that spiritual practice is really the single most important variable that affects the happiness index of the respondent. The coefficient for spiritual practice is not only the biggest positive factor, but even when an individual suffers from poor health, the fact that he/she engages in some form of spiritual practice may more than offset the negative effect from poor health. (The interactive coefficient is numerically larger than the coefficient for poor health) The high coefficient for primary education is misleading because it is collinear with old age. Among the younger groups there do not exist anyone with primary education only.
Table 3. Determinants of Happiness
Dependent Variable: Happiness Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Significant level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>33.280</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Money</td>
<td>-0.186</td>
<td>0.536</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Marriage</td>
<td>0.996</td>
<td>0.007***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Having Children</td>
<td>1.262</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Harmonious Family</td>
<td>1.586</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Friends</td>
<td>0.741</td>
<td>0.043**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Practice (Yes)</td>
<td>5.566</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young</td>
<td>-2.530</td>
<td>0.152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old</td>
<td>3.993</td>
<td>0.070*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1.904</td>
<td>0.119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>4.863</td>
<td>0.001***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Money X High Personal Income</td>
<td>-0.391</td>
<td>0.092*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Marriage X Married</td>
<td>0.269</td>
<td>0.179</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For people with high personal income, valuing money highly actually diminishes happiness. On the other hand, people who value personal relationships, especially family life, tend to be happier. Again, the coefficient on valuing spirituality is the biggest positive among all coefficients.
Appendix

Questionnaire

How are you! We are phoning from Lingnan University. We are conducting a study on happiness in Hong Kong.

Please confirm if your phone number is XXXXXXX

Are there adults over 21 who are HK residents but are not students in your apartment?

(for positive responses) Can I talk to the one whose next birthday is closest to today?)

1. Are you satisfied with your financial conditions? 0 indicates most unsatisfied, 10 indicates most satisfied.

(00) 0 分 (01) 1 分 (02) 2 分 (03) 3 分 (04) 4 分 (05) 5 分
(06) 6 分 (07) 7 分 (08) 8 分 (09) 9 分 (10) 10 分
(97) 沒有意見 “have nothing to say” (98) 拒絕回答 “refuse to respond”

2. How important is money to your happiness? 0 indicates not important at all. 10 means most important.

(00) 0 分 (01) 1 分 (02) 2 分 (03) 3 分 (04) 4 分 (05) 5 分
(06) 6 分 (07) 7 分 (08) 8 分 (09) 9 分 (10) 10 分
(97) 沒有意見 (98) 拒絕回答

3. How important is stability of income to your happiness? 0 indicates not important at all. 10 indicates most important.

(00) 0 分 (01) 1 分 (02) 2 分 (03) 3 分 (04) 4 分 (05) 5 分
(06) 6 分 (07) 7 分 (08) 8 分 (09) 9 分 (10) 10 分
(97) 沒有意見 (98) 拒絕回答
4. The SAR government currently subsidizes health care heavily thus allowing Hong Kong people to get reasonably good health care at a low cost. How satisfied are you with this situation? 0 indicates most unsatisfied, 10 indicates most satisfied.

(00) 0分 (01) 1分 (02) 2分 (03) 3分 (04) 4分 (05) 5分
(06) 6分 (07) 7分 (08) 8分 (09) 9分 (10) 10分
(97) 沒有意見 (98) 拒絕回答

5. How important is a high quality health care system to your happiness? 0 indicates unimportant, 10 indicates most important.

(00) 0分 (01) 1分 (02) 2分 (03) 3分 (04) 4分 (05) 5分
(06) 6分 (07) 7分 (08) 8分 (09) 9分 (10) 10分
(97) 沒有意見 (98) 拒絕回答

6. How important is it to you to be free from the need to pay high health care costs that stretches your financial limits? 0 is most unimportant, 10 is most important.

(00) 0分 (01) 1分 (02) 2分 (03) 3分 (04) 4分 (05) 5分 (06) 6分
(07) 7分 (08) 8分 (09) 9分 (10) 10分
(97) 沒有意見 (98) 拒絕回答

7. How important to you is being protected under the rule of law to enjoy civic liberties such as freedom of thought, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, free access to markets, freedom of assembly etc. Living in HK does this consideration increase or decrease your happiness. 10 indicates a lot of increase, 5 indicates no decrease or increase, 0 indicates a lot of decrease.

(00) 0分 (01) 1分 (02) 2分 (03) 3分 (04) 4分 (05) 5分
(06) 6分 (07) 7分 (08) 8分 (09) 9分 (10) 10分
(97) 沒有意見 (98) 拒絕回答
8. How important is civic liberties of modern society to you? 0 indicates not important at all; 10 indicates most important.

   (00) 0 分   (01) 1 分   (02) 2 分   (03) 3 分   (04) 4 分   (05) 5 分
   (06) 6 分   (07) 7 分   (08) 8 分   (09) 9 分   (10) 10 分
   (97) 沒有意見   (98) 拒絕回答

9. HK presently does not offer popular elections. Does this increase or reduce your happiness? 10 indicates a lot of increase, 5 indicates no decrease or increase, 0 indicates a lot of decrease.

   (00) 0 分   (01) 1 分   (02) 2 分   (03) 3 分   (04) 4 分   (05) 5 分
   (06) 6 分   (07) 7 分   (08) 8 分   (09) 9 分   (10) 10 分
   (97) 沒有意見   (98) 拒絕回答

10. How important is open election of the Chief Executive to you? 0 indicates not important at all; 10 indicates most important.

    (00) 0 分   (01) 1 分   (02) 2 分   (03) 3 分   (04) 4 分   (05) 5 分
    (06) 6 分   (07) 7 分   (08) 8 分   (09) 9 分   (10) 10 分
    (97) 沒有意見   (98) 拒絕回答

11. How important is open election of all legislators to you? 0 indicates not important at all; 10 indicates most important.

    (00) 0 分   (01) 1 分   (02) 2 分   (03) 3 分   (04) 4 分   (05) 5 分
    (06) 6 分   (07) 7 分   (08) 8 分   (09) 9 分   (10) 10 分
    (97) 沒有意見   (98) 拒絕回答

12. Please advise us of your marital status:
    (1) 未婚 (Single)
    (2) 已婚，配偶仍健在 [不用追問] (Married, spouse alive)
    (3) 已婚，配偶已過身 [不用追問] (Married, spouse deceased)
    (4) 同居 (Cohabitation)
    (5) 離婚 (Divorced)
(6) 分居 (Separated)
(7) 其他 _____ (Others)
(8) 拒絕回答

13. 你現時的婚姻狀況對你的快樂增加了還是減少了？0 分代表減少了很多，10 分代表增加了很多，5 分代表沒有增加，沒有減少。
 Does your current marital status increase or reduce your happiness?  10 indicates a lot of increase, 5 indicates no decrease or increase, 0 indicates a lot of decrease.

(00) 0 分 (01) 1 分 (02) 2 分 (03) 3 分 (04) 4 分 (05) 5 分
(06) 6 分 (07) 7 分 (08) 8 分 (09) 9 分 (10) 10 分
(97) 沒有意見 (98) 拒絕回答

14. 你認為 婚姻 [指正式婚姻，不包括同居] 對你的快樂有多重要？0 分代表十分不重要，10 分代表十分重要。
 How important to you is formal marriage? 0 indicates not important at all; 10 indicates most important.

(00) 0 分 (01) 1 分 (02) 2 分 (03) 3 分 (04) 4 分 (05) 5 分
(06) 6 分 (07) 7 分 (08) 8 分 (09) 9 分 (10) 10 分
(97) 沒有意見 (98) 拒絕回答

15. 你有無子女？
 Do you have children?
 (1) 有 (2) 沒有 (8) 拒絕回答
 Have Do Not Have Refuse to answer

16. 你因此增加了快樂還是減少了？0 分代表減少了很多，10 分代表增加了很多，5 分代表沒有增加，沒有減少。
 Has your happiness increased or decreased as a result of this? 10 indicates a lot of increase, 5 indicates no decrease or increase, 0 indicates a lot of decrease.

(00) 0 分 (01) 1 分 (02) 2 分 (03) 3 分 (04) 4 分 (05) 5 分
(06) 6 分 (07) 7 分 (08) 8 分 (09) 9 分 (10) 10 分
(97) 沒有意見 (98) 拒絕回答

17. 你認為 生兒育女 對你的快樂有多重要？0 分代表十分不重要，10 分代表十分重要。
 How important is having children to your happiness.  0 indicates not important at all; 10 indicates most important.

(00) 0 分 (01) 1 分 (02) 2 分 (03) 3 分 (04) 4 分 (05) 5 分
(06) 6 分 (07) 7 分 (08) 8 分 (09) 9 分 (10) 10 分
(97) 沒有意見 (98) 拒絕回答
18. 你有沒有要好的朋友？
Do you have good friends?
(1) 有  (2) 沒有  (8) 拒絕回答
Yes  No  Refuse to answer

19. 你因此增加了快樂還是減少了？0 分代表減少了很多，10 分代表增加了很多，5 分代表沒有增加、沒有減少。
Has this increased your happiness? 10 indicates a lot of increase, 5 indicates no decrease or increase, 0 indicates a lot of decrease.

(00) 0 分  (01) 1 分  (02) 2 分  (03) 3 分  (04) 4 分  (05) 5 分
(06) 6 分  (07) 7 分  (08) 8 分  (09) 9 分  (10) 10 分
(97) 沒有意見  (98) 拒絕回答

20. 你認為 要好的朋友 對你的快樂有多重要？0 分代表十分不重要，10 分代表十分重要。
How important is having good friends to your happiness? 0 means not important at all; 10 means most important.

(00) 0 分  (01) 1 分  (02) 2 分  (03) 3 分  (04) 4 分  (05) 5 分
(06) 6 分  (07) 7 分  (08) 8 分  (09) 9 分  (10) 10 分
(97) 沒有意見  (98) 拒絕回答

21. 你是否同意：你與家人的相處融洽？0 分代表十分不同意，10 分代表十分同意。
Do you agree: You have harmonious relations with your family? 0 means total disagreement; 10 means total agreement.

(00) 0 分  (01) 1 分  (02) 2 分  (03) 3 分  (04) 4 分  (05) 5 分
(06) 6 分  (07) 7 分  (08) 8 分  (09) 9 分  (10) 10 分
(97) 沒有意見  (98) 拒絕回答

22. 你因此增加了快樂還是減少了？0 分代表減少了很多，10 分代表增加了很多，5 分代表沒有增加、沒有減少。
Has this increased your happiness or reduced it? 10 indicates a lot of increase, 5 indicates no decrease or increase, 0 indicates a lot of decrease.

(00) 0 分  (01) 1 分  (02) 2 分  (03) 3 分  (04) 4 分  (05) 5 分
(06) 6 分  (07) 7 分  (08) 8 分  (09) 9 分  (10) 10 分
(97) 沒有意見  (98) 拒絕回答

23. 你認為與家人融洽相處，對你的快樂有多重要？0 分代表十分不重要，10 分代表十分重要。
How important is being on harmonious terms with your family? 0 means not important at all; 10 means most important.

(00) 0 分  (01) 1 分  (02) 2 分  (03) 3 分  (04) 4 分  (05) 5 分
(06) 6 分  (07) 7 分  (08) 8 分  (09) 9 分  (10) 10 分
(97) 沒有意見  (98) 拒絕回答

24. 你認為你在小學、中學或大學接受的正規教育，對你的快樂是增加了還是減少了？0 分代表減少了很多，10 分代表增加了很多，5 分代表沒有增加、沒有減少。

Has your formal education increased or reduced your happiness? 10 indicates a lot of increase, 5 indicates no decrease or increase, 0 indicates a lot of decrease.

(00) 0 分  (01) 1 分  (02) 2 分  (03) 3 分  (04) 4 分  (05) 5 分
(06) 6 分  (07) 7 分  (08) 8 分  (09) 9 分  (10) 10 分
(96) 沒有接受過學校教育  I have no formal education.
(97) 沒有意見  (98) 拒絕回答

25. 你認為你在小學、中學或大學接受的正規教育，對你的快樂有多重要？
    [如在上題答案是"沒有接受過學校教育"，則問:
    你認為你沒有接受過學校教育，對你的快樂有多重要？]
    0 分代表十分不重要，10 分代表十分重要。

How important is your formal education in affecting your happiness? 0 means not important at all; 10 means most important.

(00) 0 分  (01) 1 分  (02) 2 分  (03) 3 分  (04) 4 分  (05) 5 分
(06) 6 分  (07) 7 分  (08) 8 分  (09) 9 分  (10) 10 分
(97) 沒有意見  (98) 拒絕回答

26. 你有沒有經常上教堂、禱告、靜坐或進行任何的靈修活動？

Do you regularly go to churches, pray, meditate, or otherwise engage in some kind of spiritual practice?

(1) 有       Yes I do.
(2) 沒有      No I don’t.
(8) 拒絕回答  Refuse to answer

27. 整體來說，你有幾快樂呢？0 分代表十分不快樂，10 分代表十分快樂。

Overall, taking every thing in consideration, how happy are you? 0 means not happy at all; 10 means most happy.

(00) 0 分  (01) 1 分  (02) 2 分  (03) 3 分  (04) 4 分  (05) 5 分
(06) 6 分  (07) 7 分  (08) 8 分  (09) 9 分  (10) 10 分
(97) 沒有意見  (98) 拒絕回答
28. Over the past 10 years, has your happiness increased or decreased? 0 means decreased a lot; 10 means increased a lot.

(00) 0 分  (01) 1 分  (02) 2 分  (03) 3 分  (04) 4 分  (05) 5 分
(06) 6 分  (07) 7 分  (08) 8 分  (09) 9 分  (10) 10 分
(97) 没有意见  (98) 拒绝回答

29. What is your monthly personal income?

(00) 无收入  0  (01) < $3,000  (02) $3,000-3,999
(03) $4,000-4,999  (04) $5,000-5,999  (05) $6,000-6,999
(06) $7,000-7,999  (07) $8,000-8,999  (08) $9,000-9,999
(09) $10,000-14,999  (10) $15,000-19,999  (11) $20,000-24,999
(12) $25,000-29,999  (13) $30,000-34,999  (14) $35,000-39,999
(15) $40,000-49,999  (16) $50,000-74,999  (17) $75,000-99,999
(18) $100,000 或以上  above $100,000
(97) 很难说  difficult to say
(98) 不愿意回答  unwilling to tell

30. What is your average monthly income?

(00) 无收入  0  (01) < $3,000  (02) $3,000-3,999
(03) $4,000-4,999  (04) $5,000-5,999  (05) $6,000-6,999
(06) $7,000-7,999  (07) $8,000-8,999  (08) $9,000-9,999
(09) $10,000-14,999  (10) $15,000-19,999  (11) $20,000-24,999
(12) $25,000-29,999  (13) $30,000-34,999  (14) $35,000-39,999
(15) $40,000-49,999  (16) $50,000-74,999  (17) $75,000-99,999
(18) > $100,000
(97) 不知道 / 很难说  Difficult to say
(98) 不愿意回答  Unwilling to tell

31. What is your age at your last birthday?

(01) 21-24 岁  (02) 25-29 岁  (03) 30-34 岁
(04) 35-39 岁  (05) 40-44 岁  (06) 45-49 岁
(07) 50-54 岁  (08) 55-59 岁  (09) 60-64 岁
(10) ≥ 65
(98) 不愿意回答  unwilling to tell
32. What is your education level?
(01) no formal education (02) primary school
(03) Junior High (04) Senior High
(05) Matriculation (06) Post-secondary
(07) University or above (08) others(explain)
(98) Not willing to tell

33. What is your occupation?
(01) manager/executive (02) professionals
(03) auxiliary professionals (04) clerical
(05) service workers/sales staff (06) operators and assembly line workers
(07) non-technical workers (08) other workers
(10) housewife (jump to 35)
(11) out of a job (jump to 35)
(12) retired (jump to 35)
(98) not willing to tell (jump to 35)

34. What industry do you work in?
(01) Business services
(02) Govt and public sector other than education and health care
(03) education (04) health care
(05) manufacturing (06) construction
(07) not willing to tell

35. What is your religion
(01) Roman Catholic/Christian (02) Buddhist
(03) Islam (04) Daoist
(05) Hinduism (06) Others(explain)
(07) no religion
(08) not willing to tell

36. How would you rate your health status?
(01) Not that good (02) fair (03) good
(07) not willing to tell

--- Interview is over; thank you for your assistance. ---